

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
Case File No.: FF-086768, AA-082416  
AK-040-EA00-026

Applicant(s): Vance Grishkowsky  
P.O. Box 38  
Unalakleet, AK 99684

Dick Sjoden  
1361 Hillcrest Drive #101  
Anchorage, AK 99503

Type of  
Action: Special Recreation Permits (commercial tours)

Location: Guide Use Areas 22-06 and 22-07  
Unalakleet River Drainage

Prepared By: Jake Schlapfer, Outdoor Recreation Planner

Preparing  
Office: Bureau of Land Management  
Anchorage Field Office  
6881 Abbott Loop Road  
Anchorage, Alaska 99507

Date: August 31, 2000

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

Vance Grishkowsky and Dick Sjoden have requested permission to conduct guided big game hunts on BLM administered lands within Guide Use Area 22-06 and 22-07. Specifically, they will guide within the watersheds of the Unalakleet River (Chirosky, Old Woman, North River, and South River).

Under the principles of the multiple use concept of managing natural resources, the intent of the recreation and tourism goals are to provide a broad spectrum of recreation opportunities for both the resident and nonresident recreating public. Currently there are no other commercial outfitters that operate in the Unalakleet River Drainage.

### B. Conformance With Land Use Plan:

This action is in conformance with the Southwest Management Framework Plan (MFP) dated November 1981, activity objectives Wildlife (WL-4), Recreation (R-3), and Minerals (M-2). These decisions do not directly address special use permitting, but recognize that hunting, fishing, and trapping are legitimate uses of public land.

### C. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policies, Plans or Other Environmental Analyses:

A BLM Special Recreation Permit (SRP) regulates commercial services on BLM public land and related water pursuant to 43 CFR 8372 and Handbook H-8372-1. Permits are usually for five years and must be renewed annually.

The applicants have a State of Alaska Guide-Outfitter license to guide in areas 22-06 and 22-07. (See associated maps in the case file.)

## II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

### A. Proposed Action:

Vance Grishkowsky, dba Vance's Norton Sound Guide Service,  
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Vance Grishkowsky proposes to continue guiding for big game, namely brown bear in early spring and fall within the Unalakleet River drainage. Moose and caribou are occasionally taken during the fall season. Over the past five years, he has had an average of four clients per year. Mr. Grishkowsky has private land on the Unalakleet River which serves as his base camp each day. He also leases a private piece of land within the Unalakleet Wild River Corridor which serves as a spike camp. In most cases, clients will return to the down-river base camp. There may be an occasion where tent camping may be necessary. Access to these sites is by snowmobile and plane for the spring hunts (April/May) and boat during the fall

hunts (September/October). There will not be any fuel or equipment storage on public lands. All non-burnable garbage will be hauled out.

Dick Sjoden, dba, DA Sjoden Guiding, Case File: AA-082416

Dick Sjoden is licensed to guide for big game in areas 22-06 and 22-07. He will be operating from private land located on Powers Creek just north of Unalakleet. He has applied for use of public lands within the Unalakleet River drainage for guided spring and fall bear hunting. He plans mostly for fall hunts and access up the Unalakleet River will be by boat. He has hired local licensed guides to help him with clients. He anticipates that the majority of the hunting will take place in close proximity to his Powers Creek base camp. He anticipates two to four hunters per year. He has requested use of a temporary tent camp, if necessary on public lands. No specific camp locations have been identified. There will be no fuel or equipment storage on public lands. All non-burnable garbage will be hauled out.

An associated overlay map is available for review at the Anchorage Field Office. It contains locations of all base and spike camps and general use areas for both applicants.

B. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative would be to continue present management and not to allow commercial guiding and outfitting on Public Lands.

III. **AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

A. Critical Elements:

It has been determined that the following Critical Elements of the human environment are either not present or would not be affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative:

- Air Quality
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs)
- Cultural/Paleontological Resources
- Environmental Justice (EJ)
- Farm Lands (prime or unique)
- Floodplains
- Invasive, non-native species
- Native American Religious Concerns
- Subsistence
- T&E Species
- Wastes (Hazardous/Solid)

Water Quality (Surface/Ground)  
Wetlands/Riparian  
Wild and Scenic Rivers  
Wilderness

1. Cultural Resources:  
The Unalakleet Wild River Corridor contains at least four 19<sup>th</sup> century Native Alaskan village sites, several historic 20<sup>th</sup> century cabins, a mink farm, remnants of the Washington Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS) telegraph line, and a portion of the Iditarod National Historic Trail. The potential exists for previously undiscovered prehistoric sites in this area since the region as a whole contains archaeological sites that date from the last 8,000 years.
2. Floodplain Management (E.O. 11988) Protection of Wetlands:  
There are numerous acres within the drainage that would be classified as wetland or floodplains.
3. Subsistence:  
Most of the drainage is federal public land and would be available for subsistence use. The Proposed Action will not restrict subsistence uses. No reasonably foreseeable decrease in the abundance of harvestable resources and no limitation on harvester access to subsistence species will result from the Proposed Action. Bear harvest may reduce the local bear use of salmon, thus potentially aiding salmon runs in the region.
4. T&E Species:  
Biological evaluations have determined that there are no federally listed threatened or endangered species that will be affected by the Proposed Action.
5. Unalakleet Wild River  
Under ANILCA, the upper portion of the Unalakleet River was established as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. This is administered by the Secretary of the Interior through the BLM. The Unalakleet river drainage encompasses 2,082 sq. miles and 3,245 miles of streams within the drainage system. The main stem of the river is 106 miles long with 82 miles designated as a component of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The Wild River designation is a one-half mile wide corridor on each side of the river totaling more than 45,000 acres. Commercial guiding for big game and fishing has been occurring in the Wild River Corridor since before designation. Access to the corridor is by boats during the ice

free season, snowmobiles and planes in the winter. Operation of a float plane in the Wild River Corridor is very difficult because of narrow channels and mostly short, straight stretches of river.

B. Iditarod National Historic Trail:

In 1978 Congress designated the Iditarod trail as a National Historic Trail. Section 3(c) of the National Trails System Act states "National Historic Trails shall have as their purpose the identification and protection of the historic route and its historic remnants and artifacts for public use and enjoyment". Portions of the historic route are affected by the Proposed Action. The trail is currently used for several competitive events as well as a primary travel corridor for villagers in the Kaltag/Unalakleet area. The easement for trail use across native lands in the area is limited to seasons when snow covers the ground. Use of these areas outside of the winter season would require permission from the landowner. Use of the trail on federal portions is not restricted by season.

Cultural resources related to the trail can be found in the vicinity of the Proposed Action. Remnants of the WAMCATS telegraph line, as well as structures associated with early use, occur in the area. Two public use shelter cabins are also located on the trail near the Proposed Action location.

The Iditarod National Historic Trail Comprehensive Management Plan has as some of its objectives the requirements that "In order to increase public use and enjoyment, all Trail segments identified for active management should be managed to protect and interpret their historic values... Public use of trail segments should be encouraged, protected, and managed to the extent that such use does not impact the historic values of the INHT".

C. Land Status:

Current land status consists mostly of solid blocks of BLM administered public land and some lands selected by the State of Alaska. There is no indication that the selected lands will be conveyed in the foreseeable future.

D. Soils:

The Nulatto Hills vary in elevation from 500 to 3,000 feet. Soils in these areas formed in material derived from the underlying bedrock. On the upper slopes, the mantle of weathered material is commonly shallow and there are local outcrops of bedrock. Shallow ice-rich permafrost underlies most soils in the deeper residual and colluvial material of the north-facing slopes, toe slopes, and valley bottoms, but permafrost is deep or absent on south facing slopes. In places, the toe slopes and valley bottoms have a thin silty mantle.

E. Vegetation:

High ridges and peaks over 1,000 feet have a cover of low shrubs and forbs. Lower, southerly side slopes in most places support white spruce, shrubs, and, in a few places, paper birch, alder, and grasses. Toe slopes, north facing slopes, and valley bottoms support black spruce, sedges, mosses, and other water tolerant plants. Areas bordering the Bering Sea have no trees, but do support the same sequence of vegetation. Frost scars, stone strips, solifluction lobes, and other frost features are common in those areas.

The banks of the rivers are primarily thick willows and alders with cottonwoods and spruce predominate throughout the river bottom. Gravel bars are bare or in early stages of succession depending on the frequency of flooding.

F. Wildlife:

The most common species of large mammals are moose, black bear and brown bear. Caribou pass through the area some years, but are present mostly during the winter months. Wolves, fox, beaver and other small mammals are common. Numerous neotropical bird species are summer residents and also migrate through the area spring and fall.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Critical Elements:

a. Cultural Resources:

Site erosion may result if snow machines are used without an adequate buffer of snow on the ground. Site integrity may be lost if artifacts are illegally collected or structures are damaged. Both these consequences will be avoided if the standard stipulations concerning adequate snow cover and illegal collection and destruction of sites are implemented.

b. Subsistence:

The taking of brown bears by guided hunters comprises the majority of legally harvested bears. Few (one in the last 5 years) brown bears are taken in the proposed areas of activity for subsistence purposes. It is doubtful that brown bear populations can sustain a localized harvest of 2-4 animals in the Powers Creek area proposed by Mr. Sjoden on a sustained basis.

The Proposed Action will not significantly restrict subsistence uses, alter the distribution of subsistence resources or limit subsistence user access from currently existing conditions, but may decrease the localized abundance of specific subsistence resources (brown bears) in the Powers Creek area.

c. Wild and Scenic Rivers:

There is a potential for fuel/oil spillage while refueling boats or snow machines on or near the river. Trash may be lost if not carefully contained. Large water and ice events in the spring will scour gravel bars of any debris.

2. Iditarod National Historic Trail:

Given the amount of use and duration of the activity proposed, it is expected that little to no additional adverse effects will occur. The Proposed Action could affect use and enjoyment of the Iditarod Trail by the public if proposed activities were to obstruct, block, or otherwise constrain the public's use. Use of snow machines or all terrain vehicles during periods when the trail is not covered by snow might contribute to soil erosion, compaction or damage to vegetation along or near the trail. Travel off of established routes could further damage undiscovered artifacts, relics or natural features associated with historic use of the trail.

3. Vegetation:

There could be limited damage to vegetation at campsites or from travel by snow machine if snow cover was light. Camping on gravel bars would have little impact to vegetation as frequent flooding keeps these areas relatively vegetation free.

4. Wildlife:

Impacts to wildlife from passing boats or snow machines are short term. Some habitat destruction may occur at campsites. The potential for creating "camp bear" problems through unclean campsites exists.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

If no guiding takes place, no impacts to the environment are expected. Natural processes will occur without influences.

C. Cumulative Impacts:

No residual or cumulative impacts are expected to be incurred by the implementation of the Proposed Action.

D. Mitigation Measures:

No mitigation measures are identified beyond those listed in the attached  
Stipulations and Conditions that are applied to each applicant.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

A. Persons and Agencies Consulted:

State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources  
Land Status, Letter of Concurrence

B. List of Preparers:

Jake Schlapfer, Outdoor Recreation Planner  
Donna Redding, Cultural Resources  
Jeff Denton, Subsistence/Wildlife  
Dave Kelley, Natural Resource Specialist